

21 March 1984

U.S. NAVY
MISSIONS

MCWETHY: ABC News has learned that American submarines are repeatedly violating the territorial waters of other nations while gathering intelligence. Most of the top secret missions are into the waters of the Soviet Union, but according to both active duty and retired military sources, some missions have been run into the territorial waters of those nations considered friendly to the U.S. Even friendly countries, sources say, sometimes do things they don't want the U.S. to know about, things that could inadvertently threaten American security. The missions are conducted by specially equipped nuclear-powered attack submarines, and in some cases, by a nuclear powered mini-sub called NR1. It has a seven-man crew, wheels on its underside for crawling along the bottom, and is described by the Navy as a research vessel. Why does the U.S. knowingly violate other countries territorial waters? Military sources say there are three primary reasons: one, to gather information on underwater coastal and harbor defenses, thus gaging a country's ability to detect intruders; two, to plant listening buoys in key water ways; and three, to gather first-hand intelligence on new ships, particularly submarines and missile launches from the sea. It would not be considered unusual, according to one source, for an American submarine to be lying on the bottom of the White Sea near Murmansk, well inside Soviet waters, when a new Russian submarine was making its maiden voyage, or for a U.S. submarine to be in the Sea of Okhotsk when the Soviets were test-firing a new submarine-launched missile. Military sources say the U.S. submarines are rarely detected by the Soviets during these secrete missions, but several sources indicated that on at least one occasion in the last five years, an American submarine was apparently detected, that it was attacked by depth charges but escaped undamaged. On other occasion, perhaps 10 years ago, a U.S. submarine accidentally tried to surface under a Russian warship. Both vessels were damaged. The submarine got away. The U.S. and its NATO allies have repeatedly criticized the Soviet Union for running its submarines into the territorial waters of Sweden and Norway, something U.S. submariners say they have not done, even on the secret missions. But the U.S. does take similar risks in the waters of other countries in a high stakes game that both superpowers have been playing for years. John McWethy, ABC News, the Pentagon.